

QUAKING CONVERSATION

by Lenelle Moïse

I want to talk about Haiti.
How the earth had to break
the island's spine to wake
the world up to her screaming.

How this post-earthquake crisis
is not natural
or supernatural.
I want to talk about disasters.

How men make them
with embargoes, exploitation,
stigma, sabotage, scalding
debt & cold shoulders.

Talk centuries
of political corruption
so commonplace
it's lukewarm, tap.

Talk January 1, 1804
& how it shed Life.
Talk 1937
& how it bled Death.

Talk 1964. 1986. **1991**. 2004. 2008.
How history is the word
that makes today
uneven, possible.

Talk New Orleans,
Palestine, Sri Lanka,
the Bronx & other points
of connection.

Talk resilience & miracles.
How Haitian elders sing in time
to their **grumbling bellies**
& stubborn hearts.

How after weeks under the rubble
a baby is pulled out
awake, dehydrated, adorable, telling
stories with old soul eyes.

How many more are still
buried, breathing, praying & waiting?
Intact despite the veil of fear & dust
coating their bruised faces?

I want to talk about our irreversible
dead.
The artists, the activists, the spiritual
leaders,
the family members, the friends, the
merchants,
the outcasts, the cons.

All of them, my newest ancestors.
All of them, hovering now,
watching our collective response,
keeping score, making bets.

I want to talk about money.
How one man's recession might be
another man's unachievable reality.
How unfair that is.

How I see a Haitian woman's face
every time I look down at a hot meal,
slip into my bed, take a sip of water
& show mercy to a mirror.

How if my parents had made different
decisions three decades ago,
it could have been my arm
sticking out of a mass grave.

I want to talk about gratitude.
I want to talk about compassion.
I want to talk about respect.
How even the desperate deserve it.

How Haitians sometimes greet each
other
with the two words, "Honor"
& "Respect."
How we all should follow suit.

Try every time you hear the word
"Victim,"
you think "Honor."
Try every time you hear the tag "John
Doe,"
you shout "Respect!"

Because my people have names.
Because my people have nerve.
Because my people are
your people in disguise.

I want to talk about Haiti.
I always talk about Haiti.
My mouth quaking with her love,
complexity, honor & respect.

Come sit, come stand, come
cry with me. Talk.
There's much to say.
Walk. Much more to do.

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